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Overcoming protracted displacement

Criteria for development programmes in protracted displacement

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Policy recommendations

\ Make people's agency the starting point of livelihood support

The support provided to people in protracted displacement by development actors needs to be based on a thorough understanding of their existing livelihood strategies since these are an expression of their agency and encompass capabilities, (socio-cultural) preferences and networks as well as the needs and obstacles they face. These, together with the skills and expertise of members of the target group, need to be carefully documented and analysed through participatory methods before the start of any project or programme.

\ Do-no-harm by way of a thorough contextualisation of any project

People in protracted displacement pursue their livelihood strategies in and through complex social interactions, which are a crucial formative condition of their livelihood options. The delicate balance of social relations, especially in displacement contexts, can easily be off-set by external factors including development projects, for example if these are perceived to benefit some people more than others. Development interventions should, therefore, consider the social but also the generally relevant context to achieve a lasting effect and to prevent unintended harmful effects.

\ Ensure sustainability by participation

Participation and ownership by well-trusted local partners as well as participation by the target groups are both vital to ensure a sustainable impact of the project. Not only state actors (both on national and sub-national levels), but also civilian non-state actors should be considered as implementing partners. Training, capacity-building and inclusion, i.e. consulting or employing people and institutions that will take over the work started by the project should be prioritised from the very beginning.

Overcoming protracted displacement

Development assistance in protracted displacement

In 2018, protracted displacement of refugees reached a new record, now affecting an unprecedented 78 per cent of the global refugee population according to UNHCR statistics (2019). This shows that displacement is often not a temporary phenomenon and that existing measures to support displaced persons' (re)integration are by far not sufficient. Living under conditions of protracted displacement means to be exposed to multiple constraints, legal and political exclusions and socio-economic marginalisation over long and unforeseeable periods of time. Thus, despite many instances of resilience among the displaced and local residents, most people do not manage to re-establish their status quo before displacement without external help. Often people find similarly difficult living conditions and marginalisation upon (temporary) return, which is why this *Policy Brief* includes contexts of displacement and return.

According to the findings of BICC's research project, "Protected rather than protracted", displaced persons develop their own strategies to deal with the impacts of forced and protracted displacement. Examples for such strategies include mobility, mutual support, forming local and trans-local networks, finding niche occupations, self-help organisations or establishing otherwise unavailable services and infrastructure. The research also revealed that vulnerability does not always decrease over time and that the need for assistance in contexts of protracted displacement may remain constant or even increase. In spite of this, funding and support decrease when the perceived emergency phase of displacement is over. Upon return, support is usually only granted for a very short time, regardless of how difficult the framework conditions may be or the fact that reintegration is a long-term process.

Drawing on extensive field research and the analytical livelihood approach developed in the project mentioned above, this *Policy Brief* outlines the most important elements for more sustainable livelihood support for people in protracted displacement situations. The recommendations and criteria outlined here aim to support interventions by development actors into contexts of protracted displacement to improve displaced peoples' chances of sustainable local or re-integration. Thus, the scope of possible interventions addressed here is much broader than what is commonly understood under livelihood programming. In fact, support by development actors may be most urgently needed for creating the framework conditions conducive to successful (re)integration, such as sustainable, economic development and reconstruction, good governance and human rights protection at the macro-level, access to good quality education, basic services and opportunities to claim rights for each individual. In addition to this, skill development and local value chain projects can be vital contributions, if well adapted to the local context. A set of criteria for good development practice to overcome protracted displacement is attached to this *Policy Brief*.

Identifying protracted displacement and analysing livelihood strategies

As a first step, this requires recognising the protracted displacement of people as such. Protracted displacement affects any individual who has been unable to overcome the impacts of forced displacement for long periods of time, sometimes for generations. Situations of protracted displacement have been characterised as forgotten or invisible "crises" of a long-term nature. Yet, they pose multiple hardships for the affected populations (both displaced and not displaced), such as precarious living conditions, legal and political exclusion and high levels of insecurity. Situations of protracted displacement can be found anywhere from large urban settlements to remote rural areas and marginalised borderlands including in conflict zones (often protracted internal displacement).

Second, it requires that displaced persons be included in the project design phase. Through participatory needs assessments, focus group discussions and/or surveys with members of all locally present social groups (different ethnic groups, displaced persons/returnees, stayees/local residents, different gender and age groups, different social classes / strata), their livelihood strategies, needs and constraints need to be collected and analysed. The causes of unmet needs and lack of access to vital resources and services must be established from the perspective of affected groups. These preparatory steps should also assess existing skills and expertise among the target group(s) and, where possible, identify legitimate representatives for each group to include as many as possible of them in project implementation.

Gaining access to and knowledge about all locally relevant groups in contexts of protracted displacement is a challenge. There are high numbers of people without legal documents, people who live in hiding and do not want to reveal their identity, livelihood strategies or displacement history. There are highly mobile people and people living in territories under the control of non-state armed groups, where access and mobility are restricted or not permitted. Such groups are highly vulnerable and also hard to reach. Moreover, issues like undocumented persons and territorial control by non-state actors may be quite sensitive topics in bilateral cooperation. Therefore, well-trusted locally-based organisations should conduct preparatory assessments of relevant social groups and their livelihood strategies. Confidentiality and data protection have to be given utmost priority during the needs and livelihood assessment. Yet, it is essential that donors and implementing agencies are informed about the results to make sure that their interventions align with and support existing livelihood strategies, respond to actual needs of the target groups and—importantly—do not harm marginalised groups even more, e.g. by closing down livelihood options without having established viable alternatives first.

The type of project and its focus should be decided upon after having consulted the results of the analysis of target groups, their needs and livelihood strategies. Often, people in protracted displacement live in already marginalised areas (in or outside of camps, settlements, cities). In area-based approaches (ABAs), infrastructure and basic services (roads, general reconstruction, schools, hospitals, possibly irrigation facilities, vocational training, etc.) are established or improved in a certain geographically-defined location, aiming to enhance access for all people locally present. Thus, ABAs can be a positive intervention by (a) widening options and reducing access constraints relating to the unavailability or high costs of services, and (b) preventing possible tensions between local residents and displaced persons by offering structural improvements that all can benefit from. Projects need to be tailor-made in response to the findings of the preparatory assessments to proactively include marginalised and vulnerable groups usually excluded due to discrimination, local power hierarchies, hostile inter-group dynamics or lack of documents. To account for people's spatial mobility, there is a need for internationally or interregionally transferrable (training) certificates and assistance.

Systemic conflict and context analysis

Contextual factors such as the political and policy environment and actual economic opportunities play the most significant role in determining the success of such interventions. Social relations and people's positionality within their social context also facilitate or constrain access to opportunities and livelihood-sustaining resources in protracted displacement. At the same time, unequal access to assistance and opportunities and real or perceived differential treatment by external actors (including aid and development organisations) often have a lasting, negative impact on community relations, reducing solidarity towards the displaced, or fuelling hostilities and harassment.

Therefore, the planned project or programme needs to be embedded in a thorough understanding of the relevant context and its de facto implications for people's livelihood options. For example, vocational training and skill development programmes need to be based on actual labour market demands, ideally long-term or permanent ones, as well as actual employment chances of target groups including culturally-based constraints for certain gender, age or minority groups. Projects that offer legal consultancy or to increase the awareness of human rights need to be based on a de facto understanding of displaced persons' opportunities to claim their rights rather than on rights guaranteed to them on paper, etc.

A do-no-harm assessment preceding the start of the project needs to put specific emphasis on the social relations of target groups and the likely effects of the planned intervention on these groups. Social commitments and obligations emerging out of social relations of support and exchange over long periods of displacement need to be considered as well as potential grievances of non-target groups and their implications. To do no harm, all social groups need to be considered regarding their mutual links and interactions (including self-settled and undocumented refugees, earlier groups of displaced persons, labour migrants present in the area, etc.). This includes accounting for exploitative relations target groups may have with other / more powerful stakeholders, who may reap the benefits of an intervention or who may be in a position to block target groups' access to resources, regardless of or even because of the measures aiming to support them. Proceeding with a do-no-harm analysis in such a systemic way also allows for a reflection of the role and positionality of implementing and funding agencies in their respective contexts, which is a crucial precondition for facilitating meaningful participation.

People in protracted displacement often live in areas with high levels of insecurity and sometimes under conditions of protracted armed conflict. Even when the conflict has officially ended, the situation is often volatile and needs to be monitored very carefully and

permanently to recognise potential shifts towards destabilisation and renewed outbreaks of violence early enough to act accordingly. Conflict assessments should consider historical conflict lines and developments and assure that assessments of the security situation, especially in contexts of return and reintegration are based on the factual assessment of the impact of peace agreements. While do-no-harm and conflict-sensitivity assessments are mandatory for projects with implications for peace and security (funded by the BMZ) and are therefore standardised, in practice, exceptions to this rule have been made either due to time pressure or due to the inclusion of displaced persons as additional target group into previously running projects (Kinzelbach, Lehmann, Carius, Rüttinger & Rietig, 2017).

Ensure sustainability by participation

Ideally, to ensure a lasting impact of the project, its aim and approach should be aligned with a long-term government strategy in the same field and implemented in close cooperation with the responsible state and non-state authorities. Strong support by the government, especially in the sectors of health and education, is crucial to allow the building up of country-wide and lasting structures. Reaching out to local and mid-level government institutions in the project areas depending on their competencies and responsibilities is also crucial. Especially where state capacities are insufficient, effective and smaller-scale development projects can also be planned, designed and implemented in partnership with peaceful / civilian non-state actors. Such partners may allow access to and inclusion of extremely vulnerable groups, which may otherwise be difficult to reach out to.

Due to the difficult framework conditions in fragile and conflict-affected settings, such as destroyed infrastructure, lack of development, continued presence of (formerly) armed groups, rampant corruption, lack of security, informal economies and high mobility of criminal actors, it is paramount to link the mapping of potential project partners with the results of the conflict assessment.

The participation of members of the target groups is another aspect with which a sustainable impact can be achieved. Participatory methods have long been used in livelihood programming and development, but have also been criticised extensively for overly limiting the space for participation or gathering support for already predetermined interventions. Thus, the benchmark for meaningful participation would be, whether input from target groups and beneficiaries can actually achieve a change in the planned intervention or not. The findings of the BICC research show that people in protracted displacement are anything but united and do not necessarily share similar interests. Often, there are clear ethnical and political divisions among the displaced. Also, displaced persons come from very different socio-economic backgrounds and are placed into different legal categories by the political system in the receiving country context, resulting in the fact that their needs may vary greatly. These, as well as cleavages, boundaries and dividing lines within the target groups need to be identified and factored into the project design, i.e. reconciliation or governance programmes aiming to strengthen the rule of law.

To create a sustainable impact, the building of local capacities of people (through involvement and, where necessary, training) and institutions (capacity-building and partnership in project implementation) who will continue the work started through the project once it runs out needs to be given utmost priority from the very beginning.

Conclusion: Overcoming the distinction between local integration and reintegration

Support for sustainable livelihoods and framework conditions conducive to integration are not only preconditions for displaced persons' self-reliance, they also offer potential benefits to the receiving society. Increasingly, however, such approaches are met with objections by the receiving country government due to fears that they may prevent repatriation. From a livelihood perspective, return and local integration should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Based on an understanding of displaced persons' factual livelihood strategies and constraints, the widening of people's options (e.g. allowing them to acquire skills, to access education, employment, a safe legal status and options for mobility), is the best precondition for successful reintegration, once conditions for return are considered appropriate. Based on the findings of this research, the following section compiles a detailed list of criteria that should be taken into consideration when livelihood support for people in protracted displacement is at stake.

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List of criteria for development projects and programmes providing livelihood support to people in protracted displacement

This catalogue is designed to support any programme or project by development actors in the field of reintegration and local integration of displaced persons with regard to its ability to support the livelihood of people in protracted displacement sustainably. Its scope encompasses the planning and preparation, the implementation phase as well as the finalisation of an intervention. As a template, it needs to be adapted to the specific local circumstances of each project or programme. The criteria are phrased as questions; a negative answer indicates a need for the approach to be adapted.

Preparation of the intervention

Assessment of the local context

- \ Does the planned intervention consider results of a recently conducted conflict assessment?
- \ Does the planned intervention consider results of a recently conducted systemic analysis of the social, economic, political context?
- \ Did these assessments follow a regional, trans-local perspective, i.e. including cross-border dynamics?
- \ Have all relevant social groups been identified (including e.g. undocumented, invisible, highly mobile persons as well as people living on the other side of the border) and been included in the planning, the impact or do-no-harm analysis and as potential beneficiaries?
- \ Have legitimate representatives of the target groups been identified, wherever possible, and has the mapping of local representatives been linked to the results of the conflict assessment?

Assessment of needs and capacities

- \ Is the planning of the intervention based on a thorough livelihood analysis of all relevant social groups and a participatory needs assessment (respectively surveys or focus group discussions)?
- \ Have all livelihood constraints as well as existing capacities of the target group been identified to adequately build upon existing resilience and livelihood strategies?

- \ Have local capacities, skills and expertise, especially among the target groups, been assessed to make sure that input by the implementing agency is kept to a minimum and as many responsibilities as possible are carried out by qualified local staff?

Assessment of participation and do-no-harm

- \ Have locally adapted criteria for do-no-harm standards been defined and communicated among all relevant persons, especially project staff and representatives of target groups?
- \ Is their consideration outlined in detail and double-checked by the implementing organisation, the contracting authority and representatives of the target and non-target groups?
- \ Has a training schedule been developed to fill all gaps in the staff portfolio necessary to continue the work of the project, which cannot yet be filled with local staff?

Collaboration / coordination

- \ Have (sub-) national, regional, and international actors working in this location been identified and consulted? Is there a coordination mechanism (or body) for external and domestic actors working in the area/on the subject?
- \ Has the mapping of local representatives and project partners been linked to the results of the conflict assessment?
- \ Does the local population perceive participating partners as legitimate?

Clear and transparent exit strategy

- \ At the design stage of the project, have specific criteria been defined to measure the outcome?
- \ Have the goals of the project, the aimed-for impact and the planned timeline clearly been communicated to the beneficiaries and local partners?
- \ Does the project have a strategy to build local capacities and transfer responsibility onto local partners for the continuation of the work?

Implementation phase

Transparency

- \ Have the concrete aims and activities of the planned project or programme been clearly communicated to the target groups and is the information accessible?
- \ Have the limitations of the project been clearly communicated to the target and non-target groups?
- \ Have the planned timeline and end-point of the intervention been clearly communicated to all relevant stakeholders?

Participation and flexibility

- \ Is participation by local representatives and target groups institutionalised?
- \ Can additional needs communicated by the beneficiaries be incorporated?
- \ Is there an effective and barrier-free (language, literacy, no internet, etc.) mechanism for complaints and feedback?

Local ownership

- \ Are existing local capacities / structures / institutions involved in the implementation phase? Are they perceived as legitimate?
- \ Is the input by the implementing organisation limited to the minimally necessary requirements and all other tasks transferred onto local authorities, target groups and local experts?
- \ Have existing local capacities/structures/institutions been identified to take over the relevant tasks after the end of the project (possibly after receiving relevant training and support)?
- \ Are contracts and agreements between target groups or development actors and target groups (e.g. MoU) transparently communicated and explained, and do their provisions touch upon all points which require a regulation including termination clauses?

Conflict-sensitivity

- \ Is a continuous conflict assessment conducted to monitor impacts of the intervention and to recognise early indications for renewed violence?
- \ Are the do-no-harm criteria upheld? Are they sufficient, or do they need to be updated?
- \ Are there any mechanisms to respond to cases of unintended negative consequences and are they considered regularly?
- \ Does the employment of local staff follow the principles of conflict-sensitive employment?

Towards the planned end of the project

Exit conditions and sustainability of the programme

- \ Has progress towards the project goals been sufficiently formalised (e.g. valid contracts or land titles, educational or training certificates) so that progress cannot be easily turned back after the end of the intervention?
- \ Have local conditions on the ground (especially de facto levels of violence and risk of renewed conflict outbreak, which could require more or different kinds of assistance) been taken into consideration before terminating the intervention as planned?
- \ Are local institutions sufficiently trained, staffed and funded, preferably from domestic sources, to ensure that future needs for assistance can be dealt with after the end of the project?
- \ Are local institutions connected well enough to represent the interests of the target groups after the end of the project (i.e. are they active at all levels of government)?

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